

WHERE IS ANNA? WHAT HAPPENED TO ELLY? – ASGHAR FARHADI REWRITES AND RE-VEILS MICHAELANGELO ANTONIONI

SUMMARY

The description of the plot of Asghar Farhadi's *About Elly* might give the impression that Farhadi is gunning for the position of 'the Iranian Antonioni'. At a closer view, it turns out not to really be the case. Despite lifting its storyline straight from the art cinema classic *L'Avventura* by Antonioni, unlike the Italian film director, Farhadi uses the situation of a missing woman to make sharp observations about his society, particularly the position of women and marital relationships. The aim of this paper is to use the notion of intertextuality to examine the relations between these two films. Analysing *About Elly* along the *vertical axis*, which connects the text/film to other texts/films I would like to compare the similarities and differences in the narrative structure and in the comment on the social world.

About Elly (*Darbāre-ye Elly*, 2009) is the fourth film directed by Asghar Farhadi.¹ He started his career by making short 8mm and 16mm films in the Isfahan branch of the Iranian Young Cinema Society before moving on to writing plays and screenplays for the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).² He also directed such TV series as *A Tale of a City* and co-wrote some screenplays. *Dancing in the Dust* (*Raqs dar ghobār*, 2003) was his feature film debut, which

¹ Farhadi was born in 1972 in Hodayun-shahr (Khomeyni-shahr of today), in the Province of Isfahan. He is a graduate with a BA in Dramatic Arts and a MA in Stage Direction from Tehran University and Tarbiyat-e Modares University.

² IRIB – formerly called the National Iranian Radio and Television until the Islamic revolution of 1979, is a giant Iranian corporation in control of radio and television, and is among the largest media organizations in Asia and the Pacific region, and a regular member of Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union.

was followed by *A Beautiful City* (*Shahr-e zibā*, 2004) and *Fireworks Wednesday* (*Chahārshanbe-suri*, 2006).

As it was in his previous movie, the topic of *About Elly* is the relationship among some middle class families in contemporary Iran. A group of friends from Tehran go on a three-day vacation near the Caspian Sea. They are former classmates from the Faculty of Law at the university. The three couples include Sepide (Golshifte Farahani) and her husband Amir who have a little daughter. Shohre and her husband Peyman have two children including their little son Arash. Nazi and her husband Manuchehr are the third family. The trip is planned by Sepide, who brings along her daughter's kindergarten teacher Elly (Tarane Alidusti). Sepide's hidden agenda in bringing Elly on this trip is to set her up with Ahmad (Shahab Hosseini), a divorcee who has come back from Germany and is looking for a new wife. Sepide lies to the old rural woman, who rents them a villa, about the relationship between Elly and Ahmad: she says they are married and are there for their honeymoon. Elly calls her mother and lies to her saying that she is with her co-workers at the seaside. The young people enjoy their time at the seaside playing charades and sports games. Only Elly, who is stranger to the group, seems to be a bit confused and sometimes even anxious for unknown reasons that are revealed much later. Secrets and lies multiply from the very beginning.

The young teacher is a little shy, but she begins to feel attracted to Ahmad, who seems to feel the same way. At the same time she resists staying longer than one day. Sepide tries to make her stay by hiding her luggage. Shohre asks the teacher to watch the children who are playing with a kite near the sea. Suddenly, the idyllic atmosphere changes into a nightmare as Arash is about to drown in the sea. Sepide's daughter shouts to the men playing volleyball to come and rescue little Arash from the water. After rescuing the boy, they look for Elly, who is now missing, questioning themselves whether she has drowned or returned to Tehran. Trying to discover what happened to the teacher they have to alarm the police. The search along the shore with the help of divers shows no results. Later we learn that the missing woman is a kind of a mystery to everybody. Nobody even knows her family name. They try to get some information about Elly using the cell phone she left in her bag. They are very confused to discover that she was engaged. Sepide reveals that she was aware of this fact but she also knew that the girl was not happy with her fiancé. From that moment, the most important thing for the group is to save Elly's honour by hiding the fact that she came to the seaside for a date. Waiting for Elly's fiancé, Ali Reza, they try to construct the best version of the story and the main material used for this construction are lies. Despite these efforts, it is not possible to hide the truth because every

member of the group tells Ali Reza a slightly different version of the events when he turns up asking questions. At the very end comes the message from the police: the body of a woman is found in the sea. Ali Reza identifies the dead one as Elly.

About Elly was very well received both in its home country and abroad. The movie was Iran's official submission for the competition in the Foreign Film section at the 82nd Academy Awards. The movie won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the 59th Berlin Film Festival and the Crystal Simorgh for best directing at the 27th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran. One year after its release, it was voted the 4th greatest Iranian movie of all time by the national society of Iranian critics.

In many reviews the critics pointed out numerous links and references between *About Elly* and the Italian film *L'Avventura* (*Adventure*, 1959) directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Daniel Kasman writes about 'Asghar Farhadi's Antonioni revision.'³ Adam Eisenberg in his review from Tribeca Film Festival called *About Elly* «a mirror of sorts to Michelangelo Antonioni's stylistic revolution, *L'Avventura*».⁴ Actually, having seen *L'Avventura*, it is easy to notice the similarities, especially in the plot. Both films center on the mysterious disappearance and ambiguous fate of an enigmatic young woman.

In *L'Avventura* a group of wealthy friends are cruising the sea near Sicily on a yacht. They anchor near an unpopulated volcanic island, swim ashore and begin to explore. Anna (Lea Massari) quarrels with her lover Sandro (Gabrielle Ferzetti). They both go ashore, along with her friend Claudia (Monica Vitti) and others. After some time Anna cannot be found. The others search the island for her (there seems only to be a few places to hide) but she cannot be found. Within a few days, they drift back to their lives as the story shifts to a new stormy relationship between Sandro and Claudia. Claudia is at once happy about the sudden interest from Sandro's side and wracked with guilt over her missing best friend. Anna is never found and she is quickly forgotten. She served her function (lover, friend), and now that she is gone, the function must be fulfilled by somebody else. The participants of the cruise perceive this accident as something usual: 'When you consider all Italy there is a disappearance rate of 40 thousand people a year – that is almost enough to fill San Siro stadium.'⁵ Life goes on. The essence of this life are luxurious parties, flirting and short love affairs.

The narrative structure of *L'Avventura* became famous because Antonioni shows us a search without a conclusion, a disappearance without a solution.

³ Kasman 2009, Tribeca 2009: *About Elly*, <http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tribeca-2009-about-elly-farhadi-iran>

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7890194.stm>

⁵ Quotation from the movie *L'Avventura*.

The movie systematically subverted the filmic codes, practices and structures in currency at its time. Released in 1960, the film was booed by members of the audience during its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival (Antonioni and Vitti fled the theater). The viewers were so irritated that some of them wrote on the walls: 'Where is Anna?'.

After a second screening *L'Avventura* won the Jury Prize and went on to both international and box office successes. It influenced the visual language of cinema, changing the way subsequent films were made, and has been named by some critics as one of the best films ever made. However, it has been criticized by others for its seemingly uneventful plot and slow pacing. Antonioni's film can be called a latently post-war Italian version of *film noir* – only here the heart of the matter is not solving the dark mystery of how Anna has gone missing, but realizing how little anyone cares.

Adam Eisenberg noticed that sometimes the contrast between Farhadi and Antonioni is very sharp: 'In Farhadi's world, cold glances, a husband's demand for more tea, and tearful rage, are all comments, not symbols, on a culture where telling the truth is often not the best option. It's a culture that lends itself to suspense, and Farhadi might have more in common with Hitchcock, than the Iranian New Wave he emerges from.'⁶ The Polish film critics also noticed that Farhadi has an instinct of a thriller director.⁷ He knows very well how to draw a line between two parts of the movie – the idyllic and thrilling one. This way of 'adapting' Antonioni's masterpiece by including some elements of thriller style made some critics complain about it. In Daniel Kasman's opinion, Farhadi picks up modernist film and takes it down the conventional route of story and psychology.⁸ Kasman claims that Iranian director too easily adapts '...that scenario from Highly Formalist Playground into sub-Agatha Christie stuck-in-a-room-when-everyone-suspects-each-other.'⁹ We can find similar remarks in the review by Conall Cash: 'Despite lifting its storyline straight from the art cinema classic 'L'Avventura', 'About Elly' is very much a mainstream film with mainstream concerns.'¹⁰

In my opinion, before we start complaining about the fact that *About Elly* is not as unique, excellent and sophisticated as *L'Avventura* we should take note

⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7890194.stm>

⁷ Lipińska 2009. *Kobieta pod presją*, <http://www.stopklatka.pl/film/film.asp?fi=37312&sekcja=recepcja&ri=6855>

⁸ Kasman 2009, op. cit.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Cash 2009. *About Elly*, <http://www.screenmachine.tv/2009/07/27/miff09-review-about-elly-dir-asghar-farhadi/>

of that the movies belong to different periods in film history. Antonioni's film is made at the peak of cinematic modernism while Farhadi's movie belongs to the paradigm of postmodernism. Postwar Modernism is a style or movement of experimental filmmaking that appeared in Europe after the Second World War and manifests an increasing attention to the modes of representation themselves. Rather than attempting to represent the world, feelings or relationships, the modernist artist concentrates on the way representation organizes our often very different experiences of the world. Stylistically, Modernism has distinct technical characteristics as well. The long take, which is an abnormally lengthy shot, is one and was justified by the Modernist filmmakers (including Antonioni) as representing events in continuous «real time» – without manipulation through editing. Modernist films also tended to favor open-ended narratives, where the central plot does not get resolved (the opposite of most Hollywood films).

Modernist cinema explored and exposed the formal concerns of the medium. The auteur theory and the idea of an author producing a work from his singular vision guided the concerns of modern film. Postmodern cinema has different aims and aesthetics. Intertextuality, self-referentiality, pastiche, parody and a recourse to various past forms, genres, and styles are the most commonly identified characteristics of postmodern cinema. Most of these features may be found in a Farhadi's film's form and story. *About Elly* refers to Antonioni's *L'Avventura* but also refers to Hitchcock's psychological thrillers, mystery films¹¹ and to amateur home movies shot during parties. This collapse of the distinction between high and low art styles, techniques and texts (films) is one of the key characteristic that separate postmodern cinema from modernist cinema or traditional narrative film.

Analysing *About Elly* and its reception I will focus on the aspect of intertextuality. Several types of intertextual relations has been identified. Tracing intertextualities between Farhadi's movie and Antonioni's *L'Avventura* I would argue that *About Elly* is the case of cinematic palimpsest.

The term 'intertextuality' has, itself, been borrowed and transformed many times since it was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s. Kristeva's coinage of 'intertextuality' represents an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics with Bakhtin's dialogism.¹² She connects the concept of signs

¹¹ Mystery film is a sub-genre of the more general category of crime film and at times the thriller genre. It focuses on the efforts of the detective, private investigator or amateur sleuth to solve the mysterious circumstances of a crime by means of clues, investigation, and clever deduction.

¹² Irwin 2004. Against Intertextuality. *Philosophy and Literature*, no. 2, October 2004, p. 228.

deriving their meaning within the structure of a text with the examination of the multiple meanings in each text. One of the weaknesses of structuralist semiotics is the tendency to treat individual texts as discrete, closed-off entities and to focus exclusively on internal structures. Kristeva's concept is associated primarily with poststructuralist theorists. For Kristeva, 'the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity' when we realize that meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated through 'codes' imparted to the writer and reader by other texts.¹³ The intertextual view considers each text as a part of a larger mosaic of texts. This view supports the concept that the meaning of a text does not reside in the text, but is produced by the reader in relation not only to the text in question, but also the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process.

Kristeva referred to texts in terms of two axes: a *horizontal axis* connecting the author and reader of a text, and a *vertical axis*, which connects the text to other texts.¹⁴ Jonathan Culler points out that uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes.¹⁵ My aim is, as mentioned, to 'read' *About Elly* along the vertical axis and to use the notion of intertextuality to examine the relations between Farhadi's film and Antonioni's *L'Avventura*.

Looking at *About Elly* from an intertextual perspective raises the following question: Does Farhadi only re-veil the actresses according to the rules of *hejāb* or does he reveal something else while re-writing Antonioni's film narrative structure? Like the Italian masterpiece, Farhadi's film centers on the mysterious disappearance and ambiguous fate of a beautiful enigmatic young woman we thought would be our main character, our center of attention. However, rewriting the plot the Iranian director makes one but important difference. In *L'Avventura* a central mystery is gradually forgotten and left unsolved, while Farhadi gives the answer to Elly's unexplained absence. Some critics pointing out this difference find it disappointing discovering the secret (e.g. Patrick Z. McGavin).¹⁶ Putting apart this discussion, we should rather look for another examples of similarities and differences.

¹³ Kristeva 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 69.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Culler 1981. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 105. In media such as film multiple codes are involved. The interaction of image and soundtrack offers a good example of the dynamic nature of the codes. The codes involved in such textual systems clearly cannot be considered in isolation: the dynamic patterns of dominance between them contribute to the generation of meaning.

¹⁶ McGavin. *About Elly*; <http://lightsensitive.typepad.com/light-sensitive/2009/06/about-elly.html>

The similarities between the two films are not limited to the plot. The Iranian director does justice to Antonioni by placing the story in an isolated and contained space. He goes even further limiting the location to a single beach-house setting. Moreover, he chooses similar settings i.e. the sea and rocks, but his way of storytelling and composing images are different. In *L'Avventura* humans are placed off-center, as if the rocks have been there forever and the visitors are likely to slip off into the sea, or the sky. The camera is usually far away from the characters, long shots dominate. Antonioni also points out the distance between people. In Farhadi's movie the camera is very close to the characters. The viewers feel as if they were inside the group or inside the film. Nature is nothing more than just the background for the events. The only exception is the sequence when the group is trying to rescue Arash and then diving in search for Elly. In this part of the film the sea seems to dominate over human beings. *L'Avventura* was criticised for the unaccustomedly slow tempo. Farhadi's film is much more dynamic and dramatic – especially from the moment the vacationers discover that Arash and then Elly are missing.

Both directors used the main accident to deeply examine the condition and system of values in their societies. In both movies the intrigue itself seems to have secondary meaning. Both Antonioni and Farhadi are much more interested in the analysis of repercussions of what happens when someone disappears.

Surely Antonioni saw his contemporaries as another lost generation. The modern society hipster has evolved by the end of the '50s to abandon God, love and morality for the hedonistic eruption of sexual revolution and cynical indifference. Antonioni seems to ask: Are these people trying to find love without moral compasses or do they only look for sexual adventures? A film critic Roger Ebert has described Anna's unsolved disappearance as being linked to the film's most wealthy, bored, and spoiled characters. They are all '...on the brink of disappearance (...) their relationships are so tenuous they can barely be said to exist.'¹⁷ Another American film critic, Pauline Kael, shares Ebert's opinion on Antonioni's characters: 'Too shallow to be truly lonely. They are people trying to escape their boredom by reaching out to one another and finding only boredom once again. For these idle and decadent people, pleasure is anything that momentarily distracts them from lethal ennui of their existence (...) sex is their sole means of contact.'¹⁸ In my opinion, the image of the generation is not as simple as these critics argue. Among Anna's left possessions given to her father as a symbolic bequest are the Bible and F. Scott Fitzgerald's

¹⁷ Ebert 1997. *L'Avventura*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 19.

¹⁸ Ibid.

tragedy *Tender is the Night*. Both Anna and Claudia are dissatisfied with their present relationship and they desperately yearn for deep, meaningful feeling and moral values. Claudia repeats several times 'I would like to see things clear' and talks about the need of sacrifice. 'A new man is being born... – Antonioni explained – This new man immediately finds himself burdened with a heavy baggage of emotional traits which cannot exactly be called old and outmoded but, rather, unsuited and inadequate.'¹⁹

The fact that the characters in *L'Avventura* belong to the upper class while people in the Iranian movie represent the middle class makes an important difference. Antonioni shows how material prosperity allows people to clear away the troubles of work, responsibility and goals, and expose the internal emptiness. Nevertheless, more important than the level of prosperity are other factors stemming from cultural circumstances: European individualism versus collectivism typical for Middle East societies. Another opposition is: a society in the process of sexual liberation (Italy) versus a society submitted to oppressive rules of patriarchal order (Iran).

In *L'Avventura*, after Anna's disappearance the action focuses on the growing passion between Sandro and Claudia, especially her doubts and reflections. She resists Sandro for the sake of Anna's memory. Claudia behaves in a moral way not because of group pressure but because of her own pangs of conscience in an otherwise decadent world, where nobody cares about the others. In contrast, in the world presented by Farhadi, the public opinion is the most important issue for the characters, even more important than what happened to Elly. While confronting Elly's fiancé they pretend to be morally impeccable because of the public opinion before anything else. The main problem: 'Where is Elly?' has been quickly replaced by: 'What will he think about us when he learns that we arranged the date for an engaged woman?' In this world private life is a public matter and an individual does not exist outside of the group. Farhadi is focusing on the repercussions suffered by the group rather than the individual couple. Antonioni often shows the characters left alone against the landscape, walking along empty streets or inside the buildings. The individuals not only feel alone but also adrift. In the Iranian movie such a situation hardly ever happens. Moreover, interactions between members of the group are very intense. Contrary to the Western societies where the emphasis is put on the individual, in many non-Western societies, including the Iranian one, with strong hierarchical and group-oriented relationships, the self is not fully individuated, but

¹⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/michelangelo-antonioni-459768.html>

is thought to be familial and communal.²⁰ In other words – the self is being defined foremost as part of one's family and community. Hamid Naficy argues that this produces a contradiction between an inner 'core' or private self and the outer 'shell' or public self and both of them are integral to the overall sense of the self.²¹ Psychologically, the core is supposed to be private, stable, intimate, and reliable while the outer is thought to be unstable and unreliable, the domain of corruption and worldly influences. The private, core self is jealously guarded from contamination by the outside world but in a way that reciprocal and symbiotic group relations are maintained. The inner self is generally positively valued, and its expression is demanded at appropriate times. On the other hand, the exterior is the locus of contact with the other(s) and its expression is circumspect.²²

What impact this construction of self has on the relations between the characters in Farhadi's movie? Trying to explain the inexplicable disappearance of Elly, the vacationers start to accuse each other. The deceptions and personal intrigues, secret plans and motives come to the surface. They try to track down the reason why the girl could have left (if she is not dead), who said what to whom, what it implied. When Ali Reza, Elly's fiancé, arrives, the group falls back in a cascading series of preposterous lies in order to hide – from themselves and from the outsider – what really happened. Which no one is really sure of anyway.

Not only women are restrained by the rules of patriarchal order; also men panic when they realize that the group is responsible for arranging a date for an engaged woman. Submitted to stress and pressure they change the way they treat their wives. The partnership is easily replaced by dominance and even aggression. What is more, Elly's fiancé seems to be more interested in finding out whether her behavior was correct and appropriate rather than in discovering what happened to his future wife. In the second part of the movie it becomes clear that these young people who pretended to be modern and liberated conform in fact to a very traditional code of conduct.

Both directors are interested in the diagnosis of the condition their society is in, but they focus on different aspects. Antonioni used Anna's disappearance to examine social malady and cultural alienation. Farhadi uses the narrative to criticize lies as an institution. David Bordwell wrote in his review: '...the plot

²⁰ Naficy 1999. 'Veiled Vision / Powerful Presences: Woman in Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema', in: *Life and Art – the New Iranian Cinema*, R. Issa, Sh. Whitaker (eds.). National Film Theatre, London, p. 48.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See: Beeman 1986. *Language, status, and power in Iran*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

smoothly raises some unusual moral questions. It touches on masculine honor, (...) on the extent to which we try to take charge of others' fates. I can't recall another film that so deeply examines the risks of telling lies to spare someone grief.²³ Farhadi also uses the accident to look into the oppressive way in which Iranian women's sexual relations are monitored in and by a deeply hierarchal system. Sepide – the main puppet master behind the romantic set-up is punished because she dared to act in conspiracy against patriarchal rules. She is humiliated by her husband and condemned by the rest of vacationers. Iranian women can wear Louis Vuitton's bags but in the realm of customs the tradition wins over modernity's advocacy for individual freedom. From this perspective we can perceive Farhadi's film as a demand for individual rights and personal freedom.

Farhadi claims that his purpose with the film is to tell a story which could have happened everywhere.²⁴ He wants to show the psychological universality of the situation. We may agree with his opinion and admit he managed to achieve his purpose, but there are also some nuances in the plot that are tightly related to the Iranian culture. Generally, the local cultural and social context does not make the movie a hermetically closed one – it only enriches it. We can perceive the acting of every character from the perspective of universal human behavior but also having in mind the gender rules in the theocratic Iranian society. Without any references to the Iranian culture the intrigue would not be convincing. Moreover, the cultural context allows drawing the story line in a direction unpredictable for a Western viewer. The complexity of the movie makes it impossible to describe its content and to define its style in a simple way. A Polish film critic Zbigniew Pietrasik writes that Farhadi's film is '...very Iranian but at the same time European.'²⁵

About Elly includes some defining features of intertextuality: reflexivity and alteration. Intertextuality may be visually represented by the term 'palimpsest', in this context a term for a layered text. The term has come to be used in a similar context in a variety of disciplines, including visual arts. In my opinion *About Elly* is the case of cinematic palimpsest. Farhadi scraps off Antonioni's text and writes his own in Persian on the same manuscript page. However, the faint residues of the former writing are visible enough to discern the 'underwriting'. Both cinematic texts are interacting producing intertextual

²³ Bordwell. *Observation on film art*, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/03/30/a-masterpiece-and-others-not-to-be-neglected/>

²⁴ Lipińska 2009. *Kobieta pod presją*, <http://www.stopklatka.pl/film/film.asp?fi=37312&sekcja=recenzja&ri=6855>; Gancarz 2010. *Co wiesz o Elly?: jak rasowy thriller*, <http://film.onet.pl/recenzje/co-wiesz-o-elly-jak-rasowy-thriller,1,3842215,wiadomosc.html>

²⁵ Pietrasik 2010. *Co wiesz o Elly?*, *Polityka* 15.02.2010.

and intercultural dialog. This dialog makes *About Elly* an interesting document of shifting stories between cultures.

If one wants to interpret Farhadi's movie in terms of intertextuality, one must remember that this term refers to far more than the 'influences' of writers on each other. Theorists of intertextuality problematize the status of 'authorship', treating the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what Roland Barthes refers to as the 'already-written' rather than as its originator.²⁶ In 1968, Barthes announced 'the death of the author' and 'the birth of the reader', declaring that: 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'²⁷ Barthes claimed that: 'A text is... a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.'²⁸ Barthes used the term *relay* to describe text/image relationships which were 'complementary', instancing cartoons, comic strips and narrative film.²⁹ Even if it was true in the 1950s and early 1960s, in the contemporary society visual images have acquired far more importance, so that what he called 'relay' is far more common. *About Elly* is a clear example of this notion. This movie illustrates the concept of intertextuality which claims that each text exists in relation to others. It shows that texts owe not only to their own makers but also to other texts. Inner multitextuality is also reflected in the blurring of genres and their functions which is reflected in the defining of genre. Peter Bradshaw³⁰ defines the movie as a 'psychological drama', Philip French as a 'psychological thriller',³¹ Jason Buchanan as a 'Kids and Family, Art House and International.'³² The case of *About Elly* proves that the frontiers of a film are never clear-cut.

In conclusion: The framing of texts by other texts has implications not only for their writers/makers but also for their readers/viewers. Texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through the layers of previous interpretations. From this perspective, every creation process and every reading is always a rewriting.

²⁶ Barthes [1973] 1974: *S/Z*. London: Cape, p. 21.

²⁷ Barthes 1977. *Image–Music–Text*. London: Fontana, p. 148.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁰ Bradshaw. 'About Elly' – review, *The Guardian*, 13 September 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/sep/13/about-elly-review>

³¹ French. *The Observer*, 16 September 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2012/sep/16/about-elly-review-asghar-farhadi>

³² http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/about_elly

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